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Montana Public Land Use - Quarterly Montana Resident Report

Carter Bermingham

University of Montana - Missoula

Megan Schultz

University of Montana - Missoula

Matthew Pettigrew

University of Montana, Missoula

Glenna Hartman

University of Montana - Missoula

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MONTANA PUBLIC LAND USE

CARTER BERMINGHAM, MEGAN SCHULTZ, MATTHEW PETTIGREW,
& GLENNA HARTMAN

Quarterly Montana Resident Report / 3rd Quarter: July - September 2021

ABOUT OUR WORK

Quarterly Montana Resident Study

This report is a summary of Montana residents and their self-reported use of public lands in Montana over the past 12 months. As a result of the pandemic, the number of people participating in outdoor recreation in certain parts of the country increased significantly – Montana being one of those places. Public lands, like state and federally managed areas, reported record visitation numbers for some months of 2020. In addition, anecdotal reports from public land managers and tourism partners also suggests that the level of use on public lands has been higher than in previous years.

This study was conducted to determine if residents were changing from historical locations and activities to new areas and types of recreation, and if so, why? In addition, public land reservation systems are becoming more common and bringing both successes and challenges to users. While working with land managers, this study also helps to identify the best avenue for managers to get information out to users: including communicating rules and regulations. Lastly, this report shows whether or not Montana residents feel public land agencies are sufficiently staffed in this area.

FOR ACCESS TO THE COMPLETE REPORT, VISIT OUR INTERACTIVE DASHBOARD AT
<https://itr.umn.edu/interactive-data/resident-q3-2021.php>

METHODS

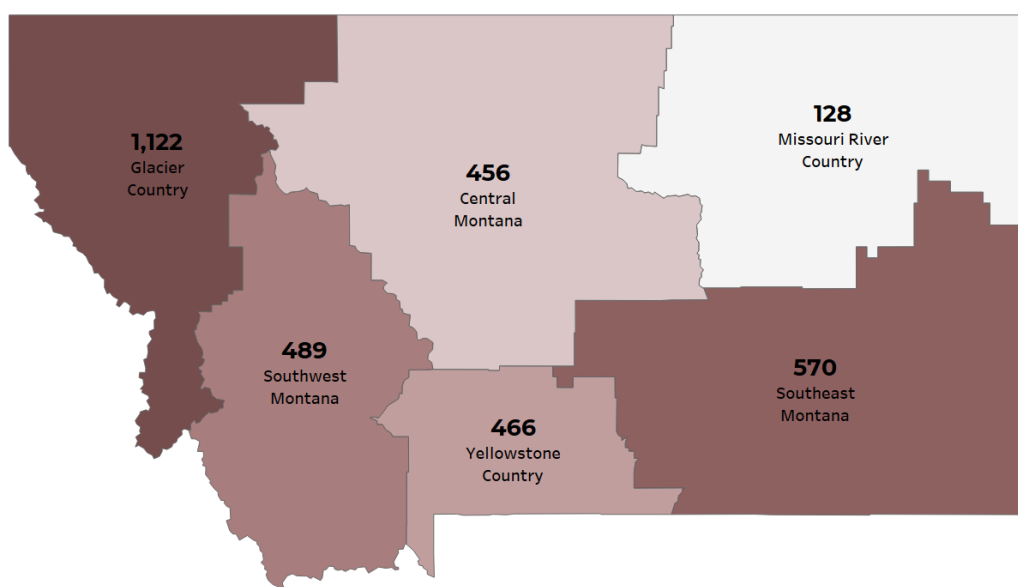
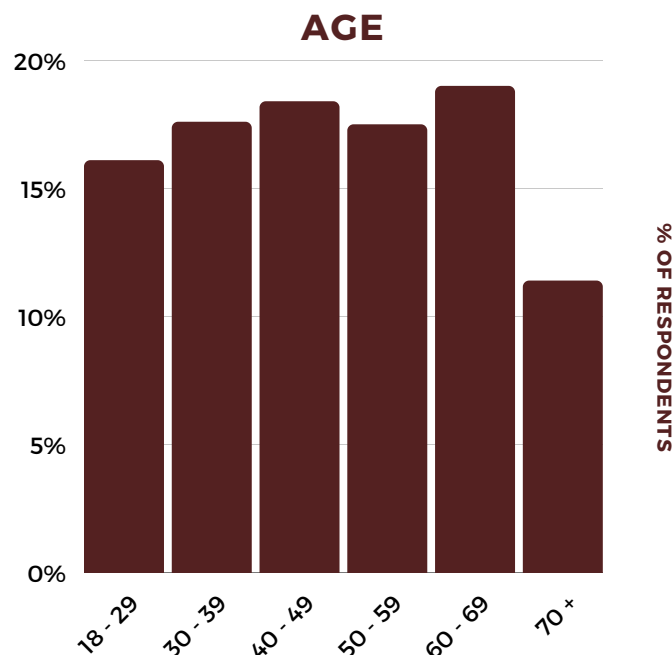
Data were collected by trained surveyors who asked questions to Montanans as they filled up their vehicle with fuel at gas stations or when they stopped at rest areas around the state. ITTR has permission from over 100 gas stations across the state to talk to residents during the time it takes them to fill their tank. From July 7th to September 30th, 2021, any Montanan 18 years of age or older at these locations had an opportunity to be surveyed about their public land use in Montana during the past 12 months. This included camping, visiting new locations, and trying new activities, among other topics. The respondent data were weighted by the county of residence and gender from the US Census, thus providing a representative sample reflecting the geographic population and gender of the state.

DEMOGRAPHICS

A total of 3,309 Montana residents were surveyed from July 7th - September 30th regarding their use of public lands across the state over the past 12 months.

Residents from 55 different Montana counties participated in the survey.

Cascade County and the Glacier Country Travel Region represented the largest proportion of residents surveyed during the quarter. A map of the travel regions is presented below with the weighted number of respondents from each region.



MONTANA TRAVEL REGIONS

Nearly 40% of residents in the sample stated they lived in a community of more than 20,000 people. Another 23% said they lived in a community with a population less than 5,000, followed by another 23% who said they lived in a rural area outside of any community borders. Just 2% of respondents said they lived in a community of 10,001-20,000 people.

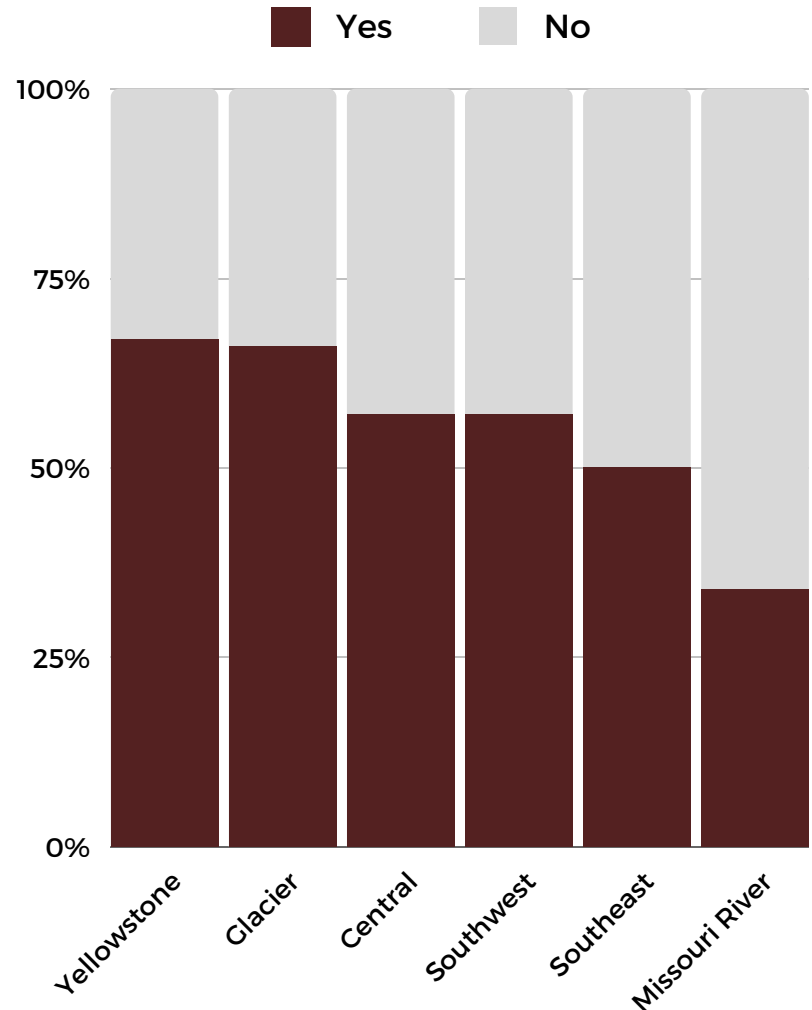
Nineteen percent of respondents were between the age of 60-69, followed by 18% who were between 40-49. Just under 18% of respondents were between 30 - 39. As mentioned in the introduction, data have been weighted by respondents' county of residence and their gender to convey an accurate representation of residents across the state.

RESIDENT PUBLIC LAND USE

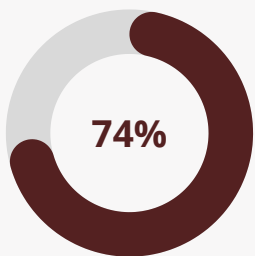
Over half (59%) of all residents surveyed indicated that they had camped in Montana in the last year (trailer/RV camping included). Overall, public land campgrounds (44%) were the most used sites, followed by undesignated or dispersed camping on public land (22%). Eight percent of respondents reported staying at a private, designated site (e.g., KOA), while 7% stayed on someone's private property.

Roughly a quarter of respondents (23%) claimed they tried to go camping but couldn't find availability at their preferred location. When asked what they did instead, 75% of respondents searched for and found another available location, while 23% chose not to camp.

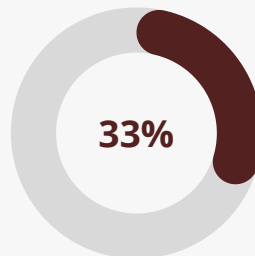
HAVE YOU CAMPED IN MONTANA IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS?



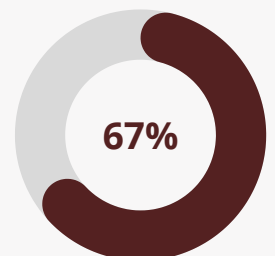
MONTANA TRAVEL REGIONS



Of those who camped in Montana in the last year, 74% did so on public land campgrounds



1/3 respondents from Yellowstone Country tried to go camping but couldn't find availability at their preferred location



Of respondents between the ages of 18-49, 67% had camped in the past 12 months

NEW PUBLIC LANDS

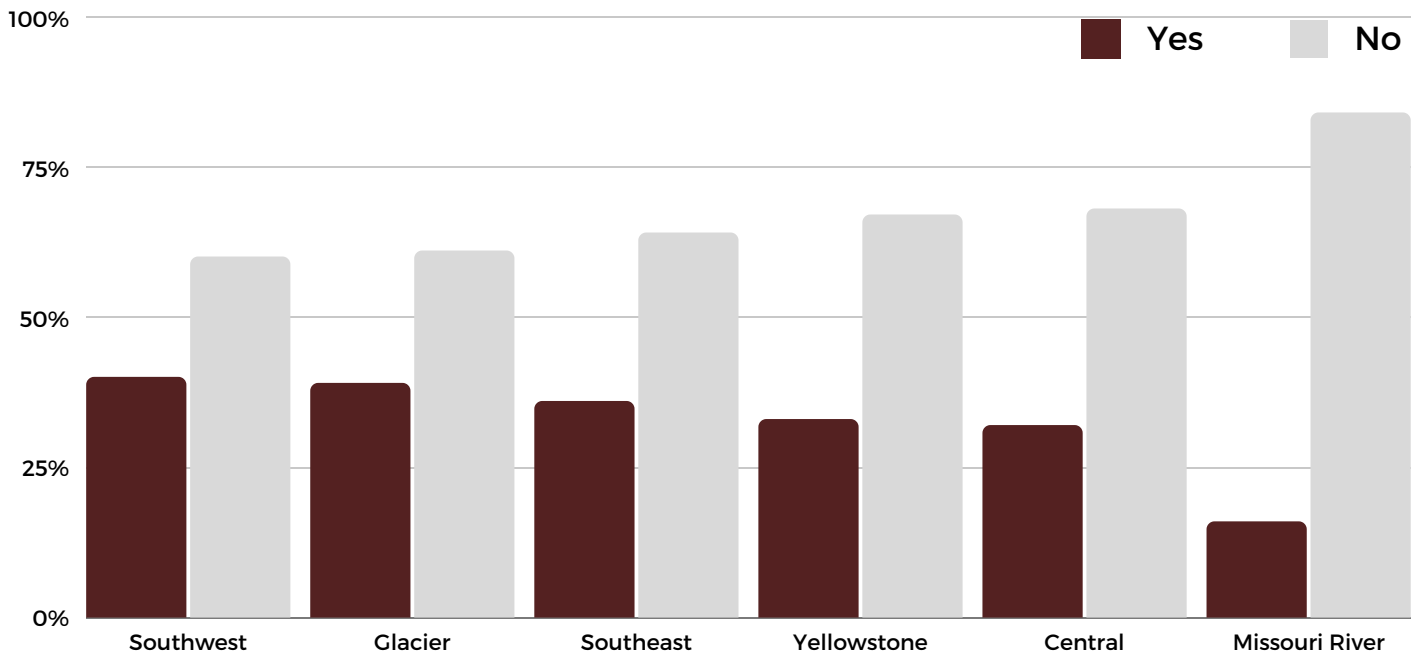
Residents were asked if they had visited any new public lands in Montana that they had **not** previously visited in the past 12 months. Almost two-thirds of respondents (64%) said no, indicating there were many residents who were content on returning to their familiar locations.

36%

Visited new public lands

17%

Participated in new activities



When analyzing results by travel region, Southwest Montana was the region that reported the highest percentage of its respondents (40%) had visited new public lands in the past 12 months. The next closest travel region was Glacier Country, with 39% of respondents indicating they had visited new public lands.

At least two-thirds of respondents from Central Montana, Yellowstone Country, and Missouri River Country stated they had not visited new public lands in that past 12 months. In Missouri River Country, 84% of respondents reported they had not visited new public lands in the past year.

PUBLIC LAND MANAGEMENT

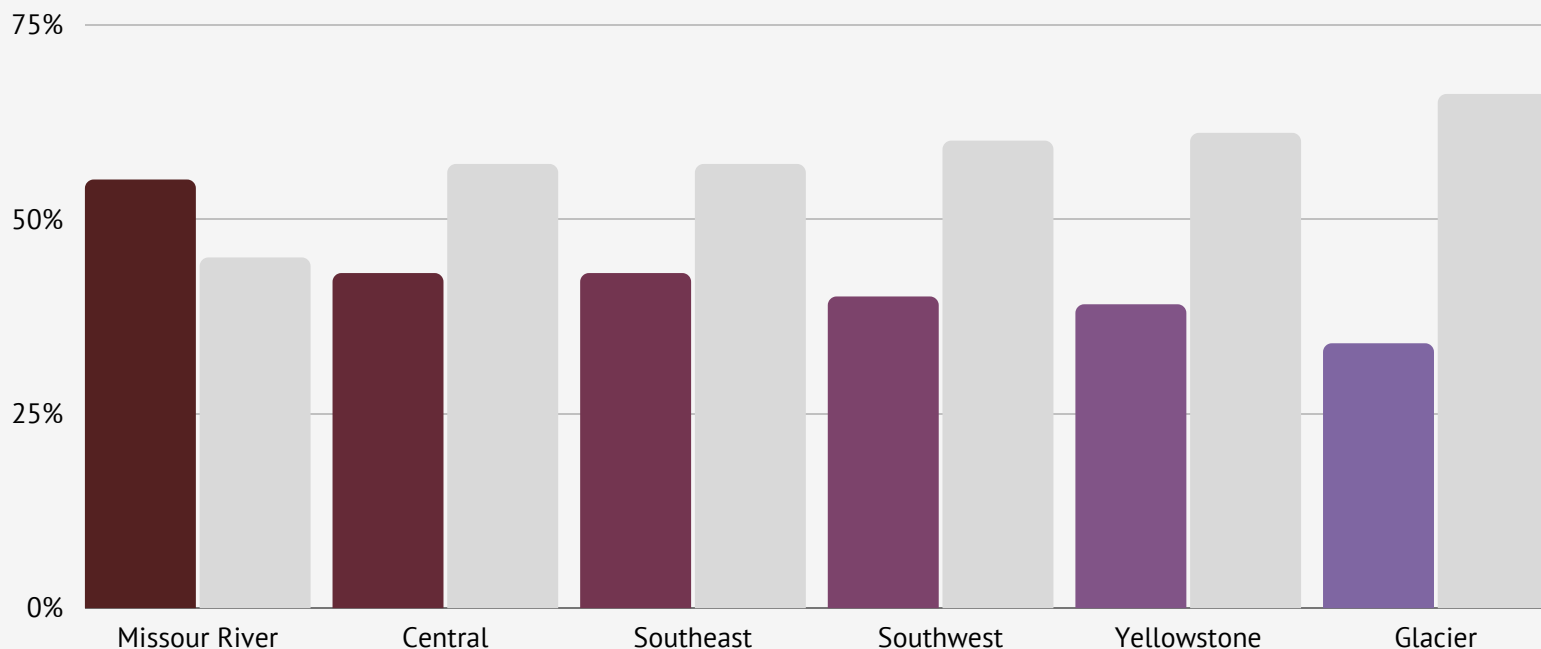
Even without the recent increase in outdoor recreation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the ability to properly staff public lands has often been a challenge for a state like Montana – one that has a small population and a large swath of land to patrol. When asked if they felt public land management agencies in Montana are sufficiently staffed, 61% of respondents said no. Much like the visitation to new public lands in Montana, results varied across the six travel regions. Missouri River Country was the only travel region where a majority of respondents (55%) felt their public lands were sufficiently staffed.

61%

A majority of respondents felt that public land management agencies in Montana are **NOT** sufficiently staffed

DO YOU FEEL PUBLIC LAND MANAGEMENT AGENCIES IN MONTANA ARE SUFFICIENTLY STAFFED?

■ Yes ■ No



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Seventy percent of all respondents **did not** attempt to use a public land reservation system to book their campsite.

70%

Of respondents who attempted to use a public lands reservation system, 70% were successful in booking a campsite.

36%

Over 1/3 of respondents from Yellowstone Country made an attempt to use a public lands reservation system, the highest proportion of any travel region.

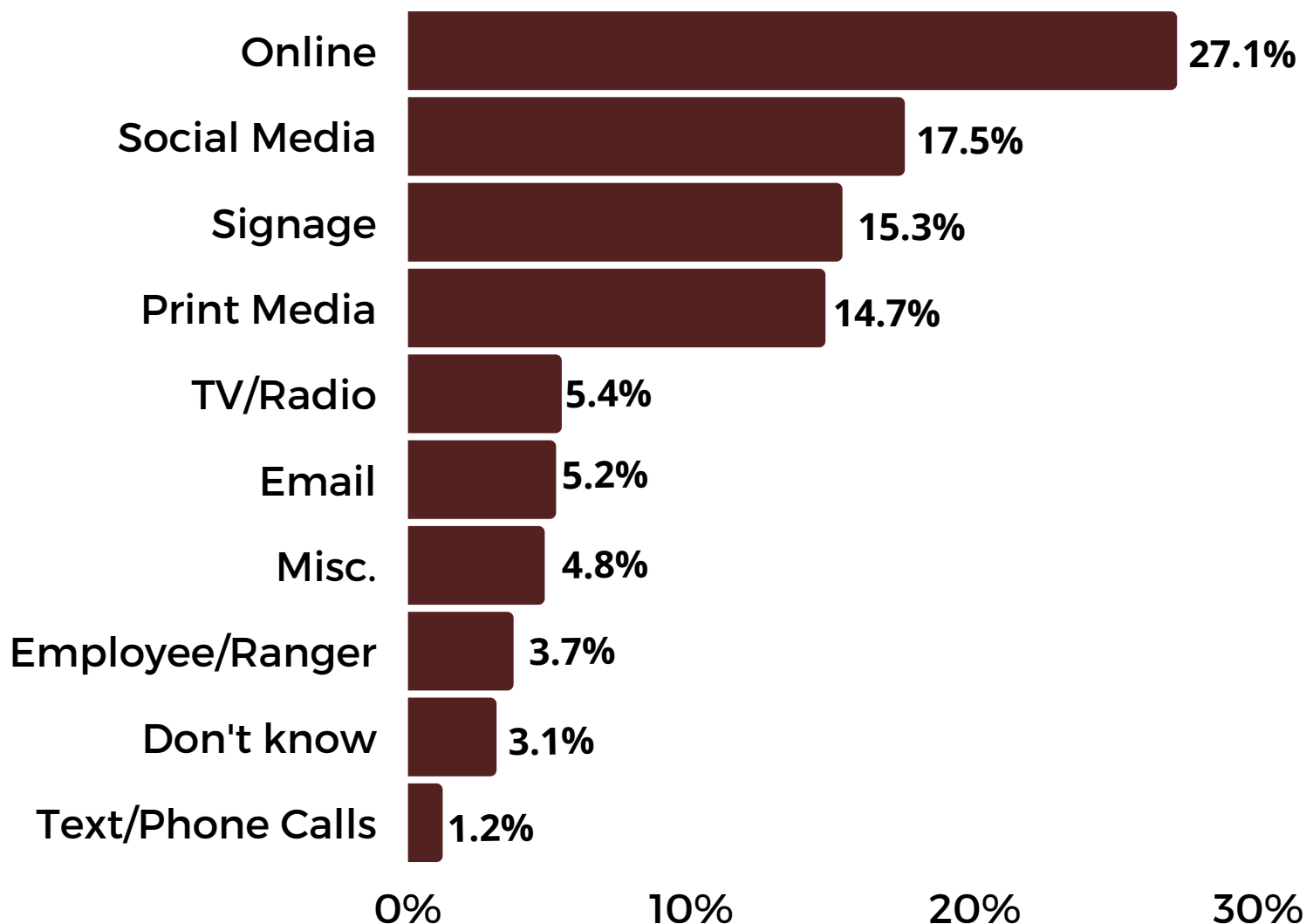


When asked what avenue would be most effective for managers to communicate rules and regulations about public lands in Montana, the #1 choice from respondents was social media.

QUALITATIVE DATA

What avenue would be most effective for managers to communicate rules and regulations about public lands in Montana?

3,541 total responses



18% of those that responded "Social Media" specifically mentioned Facebook

Themes identified in the open-ended comment section included understaffing and frustration with reservation systems. Respondents expressed that Montana residents often face barriers when wanting to recreate on public lands.

"Disappointed in online booking. Used to be done local, now it is done long distance and not near as effective. Feels the agencies could be better staffed and keep facilities cleaner."

"Montanans should not have to wait or get reservations to go to parks or campgrounds."

"Getting too crowded and busy and going out less due to these factors...camped all the time when I could pack up and go. Worried about online requirements to get site."

"Dislikes the reservation system. Feels that it favors people who can plan months in advance."

"Reservation system not a fair system, [but] understands out of state tourism is important - sad locals cannot get a spot..."

